

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 06668 01 OF 02 251308Z

43

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 SCS-03 SCA-01 AID-05

IO-10 OC-05 CCO-00 SCCT-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 /096 W

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O 251200Z MAY 75 ZFF-4

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4493

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 6668

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS LE PLO

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN LEBANON - SITREP AS OF NOON MAY 25

REF: BEIRUT 6652

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 06668 01 OF 02 251308Z

1. CLOUD OF UNCERTAINTY AND APPREHENSION STILL ENVELOPS BEIRUT AS NEW SMALL ARMS FIRE IS AUDIBLE IN QUARANTINA AREA AND SPORADIC FIRING HAS BEEN RENEWED AT CHIAH, AIN RUMMANEH AND ASHRAFIEYYEH. NIGHT MAY 24-25 WITNESSED HEAVY EXCHANGES OF FIRE (INCLUDING HEAVY WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIONS) IN VARIOUS PARTS OF CITY, AND WIDELY SCATTERED RESIDENTS REPORT SLEEPLESS NIGHT. LEBANESE SECURITY OFFICIALS CONSIDER CURRENT SITUATION "VERY BAD" AND REPORT APPEARANCE OF ARMED ELEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE CITY, PARTICULARLY IN MOSLEM AREAS AND EASTERN SECTORS OF THE CITY WHICH ARE DESCRIBED TO US AS "FULL OF ARMED MEN AND BARRICADES".

2. JOINT GOL/PLO PATROLS (REFTEL, PARA 1) ESTABLISHED IN CONJUNCTION WITH MAY 23 CEASEFIRE ARE REPORTEDLY MORE SUCCESSFUL THIS MORNING IN GAINING ACCESS TO DEKWANEH/TEL ZAATAR AREA WHERE PRESENT CRISIS BEGAN, BUT IT NOT RPT NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER SUCH PATROLS WILL BE ABLE TO KEEP THINGS QUIET THERE. IN ANY CASE, DANGER AREAS HAVE DEMONSTRABLY SPREAD BEYOND DEKWANEH/TEL ZAATAR IN LAST 36 HOURS. ACCORDING TO GOL POLICE CONTACTS, NO RPT NO AREA OF BEIRUT IS CONSIDERED SAFE MORNING MAY 25, WITH MOST PRIMARY ROADS HAVING WITNESSED ROADBLOCKS OR BARRICADES--MANNED BY ARMED MEN OF VARIOUS POLITICAL/CONFESSIONAL LOYALTIES--OR HAVING COME UNDER AT LEAST DESULTORY SNIPING AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER. SITUATION FURTHER COMPLICATED BY ENCROACHMENT OF BOMBINGS INTO AREAS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED RELATIVELY "SAFE". (OVERNIGHT, BOMB WAS DETONATED ACROSS STREET FROM WELL-KNOWN BRISTOL HOTEL.) AIRPORT ROAD APPEARS TO BE OPEN AT MOMENT, BUT POLICE SOURCES ACKNOWLEDGE IT HAS COME UNDER SOME FIRE AND COULD BE CLOSED AT ANY MOMENT.

3. SINCE CURRENT FIGHTING BEGAN LAST TUESDAY, WE ESTIMATE APPROX 50 RPT 50 PERSONS HAVE DIED WITH MANY MORE WOUNDED. LEBANESE ARMY SOURCE REPORTS ONE SOLDIER KILLED AND EIGHT WOUNDED LAST NIGHT, EVEN THOUGH ARMY HAS NOT RPT NOT INTERVENED IN FIGHTING. SO FAR AS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 06668 01 OF 02 251308Z

WE CAN DETERMINE NO RPT NO AMCITS HAVE BEEN KILLED OR INJURED IN CLASHES. NEVERTHELESS, GOL INTERNAL SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE ADVISED EMBASSY TO WARN AMCITS TO "STAY AT HOME" AND WE HAVE DONE SO.

4. MININTERIOR, BRIG. NASRALLAH, HAS JUST ISSUED COMMUNIQUE ANNOUNCING THAT INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES WILL BEGIN DESTROYING BARRICADES THAT HAVE BEEN

ERECTED IN SO-CALLED "GREEN AREA" OF BEIRUT (I.E.,
MAIN DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT BOUNDED BY PHOENICIA
HOTEL, BEIRUT PORT AND CENTRAL PLACE DES CANONS).
REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER MILITARY GOVT, WHICH IS
BEING STRONGLY ATTACKED AND CHALLENGED BY MOSLEMS
AND LEFTISTS AND SOME CHRISTIANS, WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THIS
POLICY AND IMPROVE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN CITY. POLICE AND
ARMY CONTACTS, WITH WHOME WE HAVE SPOKEN THIS MORNING,
ARE UNIFORMLY PESSIMISTIC THAT ORDER AND CALM CAN
BE RESTORED QUICKLY TO BEIRUT. IN CONTRAST TO
SITUATION LAST APRIL, REPORTS OF CONDITIONS ELSEWHERE
IN LEBANON, EXCEPT IN SOUTHERN BORDER AREA (SEPTTEL),
ARE EXTREMELY SCARCE.

5. IN MEANTIME, LEFTIST AND MOSLEM (AND SOME CHRISTIAN)
PRESSURES ON PRES FRANGIE AND PRIMIN RIFAI FOR NEW
GOVT'S RESIGNATION ARE BECOMING EXTREMELY INTENSE.
SUNNI GRAND MUFTI, SHIITE IMAM MUSA SADR AND DRUZE
SHAYKH AL 'AQL MET DURING AFTERNOON MAY 24 WITH WIDE
ARRAY OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL LEADERS (INCLUDING KARAME,
SALAM, JUMBLATT, BOTH SOLHS, AND MANY LESSER
PERSONALITIES) AND ISSUED STRONG DEMAND FOR PRIMIN'S
IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION ON GROUNDS THAT NEW GOVT IS
"UNDEMOCRATIC", PRESENTS "THREAT" TO MOSLEM INTERESTS

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 06668 02 OF 02 251320Z

43

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 6668

AND IS DESIGNED TO "LIQUIDATE" BOTH LEBANESE
"NATIONALIST, PROGRESSIVE" FORCES AND PALESTINIAN
RESISTANCE MOVEMENT. DESPITE THEIR DEMANDS, STATEMENTS
MADE WERE RELATIVELY MODERATE AND APPEARED DESIGNED NOT
TO EXACERBATE SITUATION ANYMORE THAN NECESSARY.
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 06668 02 OF 02 251320Z

DELEGATION FROM THIS MEETING LATER VISITED PRIMIN
RIFAI TO INFORM HIM OF UNIFIED MOSLEM STAND.
PRIMIN REPORTEDLY DEFENDED PRES FRANGIE'S DECISION
TO FORM MILITARY GOVT ON GROUNDS OF DETERIORATING
CONDITIONS IN LEBANON, BUT HE INDICATE HE WOULD MAKE
PUBLIC STATEMENT IN REPLY TO MOSLEM SENTIMENT ON
MONDAY, MAY 26. HE LATER VISITED PRESIDENTIAL PALACE
FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH FRANGIE.

6. PRES FRANGIE ALSO RECEIVED SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM,
WHO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY SARG AIR FORCE COMMANDER NAJI
JAMIL, DURING EVENING MAY 24. WE HAVE NO INFO RE
WHAT TRANSPIRED AT THEIR MEETING, BUT IT IS RUMORED
THAT KHADDAM DELIVERED MESSAGE FROM PRES ASSAD
PROTESTING FORMATION OF MILITARY GOVT IN LEBANON.
FRANGIE ALLEGEDLY EXPLAINED TO KHADDAM REASONS
WHICH PROMPTED HIM TO TAKE THIS COURSE. KHADDAM
WAS UNABLE CONFER WITH 'ARAFAT, WHO CLAIMED IT WAS
UNSAFE TO TRAVEL TO OR FROM BEIRUT AND PRESIDENTIAL
PALACE, BUT HE DID TALK WITH JUMBLATT. LATTER
SUBSEQUENTLY ISSUED STATEMENT ALLEGING THAT FRANGIE
HAD INFORMED SARG ENVOY OF HIS READINESS TO REPLACE
MILITARY GOVT ON CONDITION THAT CIVILIAN POLITICIANS
COULD AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES RE FORMATION OF A

SUCCESSOR GOVT CAPABLE OF RESTORING ORDER.

7. PLO LEADERSHIP HAS STILL ISSUED NO PUBLIC STATEMENT RE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, OBVIOUSLY PREFERRING TO ADOPT "WAIT AND SEE" ATTITUDE WHILE CURRENT POLITICAL TURMOIL PROCEEDS. WE HAVE ONE REPORT THAT PLO TOOK "OFFICIAL POSITION" THAT CABINET WAS INTERNAL LEBANESE MATTER AND THEREFORE NOT PROPER CONCERN OF THEIRS. PFLP, HOWEVER, ISSUED ITS OWN STATEMENT LATE MAY 24 DENOUNCING RIFAI GOVT IN VEHEMENT TERMS, AND PLO/FATAH'S FAROUQ QADDUMI REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED SAME DAY IN CAIRO PLO'S CONCERN OVER RECENT EVENTS IN LEBANON AND SAID IT IS WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS CLOSELY.

8. COMMENT: NOTWITHSTANDING ABOVE DEVELOPMENTS, LEFTIST-MOSLEM PRESSURES ON PRES FRANGIE AND PRIMIN RIFAI HAVE YET TO REACH THEIR PEAK. MOSLEMS, FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 06668 02 OF 02 251320Z

EXAMPLE, HAVE NOT YET "EXCOMMUNICATED" RIFAI OR JOINED LEFTISTS IN PROCLAIMING NATIONWIDE GENERAL STRIKE, BUT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THEY WILL DO BOTH IN NEXT 24 HOURS OR SO IF NEW MILITARY GOVT SHOWS NO SIGN OF CAPITULAING TO THEIR DEMANDS. VARIOUS CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM POLITICAL "INTERMEDIARIES" TELL US THEY ARE ACTIVELY CONSULTING WITH PRES FRANGIE TO FIND SOME "FACE-SAVING" FORMULA FOR FORMATION OF A SUCCESSOR CABINET HEADED BY MOSLEMS SUCH AS FORMER PREMIER TAKIEDDINE SOHL, ABDULLAH YAFI, OR, AS MOSLEM SENTIMENT APPEARS TO BE INSISTING, TRIPOLI STRONGMAN RASHID KARAME. THERE ARE STILL NO DEFINITE INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, THAT PRES FRANGIE HAS DECIDED TO REVERSE HIS MAY 23 DECISION TO FORM MILITARY GOVT, ALTHOUGH HE MAY BE GIVING IMPRESSION TO "INTERMEDIARIES" THAT HE IS CONSIDERING DOING SO.

9. GENERAL CONSENSUS AT THIS POINT SEEMS TO BE THAT MILITARY GOVT IS LIKELY TO BE FORCED TO RESIGN. WE UNABLE TO FORECAST THIS WILL ACTUALLY HAPPEN, ALTHOUGH ODDS AGAINST NEW GOVT AND FRANGIE AT THIS POINT ARE FORMIDABLE.
GODLEY

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